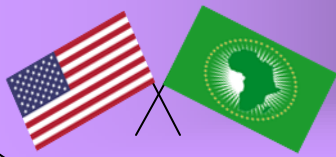


THE USAU YOUTH



Issue 001, Volume I

JANUARY 2012

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FROM AFRICAN YOUTH EMPOWERMENT TO BOOSTING INTRA-AFRICAN TRADE

"Boosting Intra-African Trade," is the theme for the 18th African Union Summit. The choice of this topic is both timely and relevant given the challenges facing African States' efforts to increase intra-regional trade. One pressing concern is the limited involvement of youth in strengthening the competitiveness of the service sector, namely the microenterprises and industries in Africa. What role should African youth – whether from the Diaspora or not – play in the effort to increase intra-African trade?

Youth employment in Africa is still a luxury.

Young people constitute the majority of unemployed people in Africa. According to the *ILO 2011 report*, they represent 60% of the unemployed in the region. A considerable number of these youth are in the Diaspora and would like to share their contributions with family on the continent but "face several frustrating barriers" bitterly affirms Alex T., who has been living in the United States. Like him, there are many who dream of a continent where investment is encouraged, no matter the domain. After receiving her Masters in Sociology, Yvette Michelle from Gabon entered the private sector and sought to develop a microenterprise of cassava transformation. She benefits from the financial support of an international NGO, but due to the credit she has to pay back to the NGO, prospects for making back her investment are slim.

Micro enterprises in Africa are struggling to compete, and many companies are forced to enter informal agreements in order to carry out payment transactions. In terms of cost, time, convenience, adaptability, and purpose throughout the continent, payment systems

are often inefficient. An international transfer of funds which takes seconds in the developed world can take weeks in some African regions. According to *the Facts and Figures of 'Africa Commission'* one in five young people have the skills to start and run businesses. Out of 100 businesses created by Youth Business International, 70% created by skilled and dedicated youth are still running and employing other young people after 3 years. The majority of these micro enterprises and industries are created by young people who are determined to escape poverty through self employment.

Boosting Intra-African trade through youth employment.

Policies that demand human labor, while improving the employability (or integration) of young men and women in the labor market, are the indispensable elements of intra-African trade. Promoting the employment of the African youth is a goal for many world leaders. Much has been done, but more remains to be done. According to the International Labor Organization (ILO) estimates, the demand for young Africans in the labor market is very low. Youth employment is

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EDITORIAL NOTE

According to the 2011 African Youth Report, the majority of Africa's population is made up of people below the age of 30. These young people, who should be the continent's greatest asset for development, face the greatest challenges in health, participation in the democratic process, and access to the type of education that would provide them with the skills and knowledge necessary for the labor market.

Mindful of this, the United States Mission to the African Union (USAU) has developed a platform through which, African youth can inform, inspire and educate each other about how to resolve their problems and become active participants in the continent's development. *The USAU Youth* will serve as a tool to motivate young Africans to become fully engaged problem-solvers both within and outside of their communities.

The USAU Youth strives to provide information on African and global issues of particular interest to the youth in efforts to inspire them to become empowered as well as promote volunteerism and entrepreneurship as a means of participating in society's overall political, economic, social and cultural development.

I am therefore honored to present this first edition of *The USAU Youth* and invite you; young Africans between the ages of 15 and 35 and every other person or institution involved or interested in African youth development and empowerment, to join our Facebook page to offer your views and tell us about the wonderful things you are doing for Africa.

Bari Fanso

USAU Youth Liaison to the AU

still a luxury. Nearly 140 million Africans are working, but do not earn enough to meet the basic needs of their families. With the current rate of progress towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) set for 2015, many African countries will not be able to meet the minimum standards for labor and employment. According to the *2011 Report of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)*, young people constitute about 37% of the total workforce and represent the social group with the fastest population growth in the world. Unfortunately, this so-called "demographic dividend" has not been accompanied by a corresponding growth in youth employment. In spite of the significant progress in the field of education, including higher education, Sub-Saharan Africa has not yet been able to improve the employment prospects of young people, especially those with university degrees. This discrepancy between high rates of economic growth and job creation accentuates income inequality and fuels social tensions. It is worthy to note that trade has been and will continue to be an enormous contribution to the development of many countries. This is a process that has lifted millions out of poverty across the world, but has yet to have a profound impact on trade between Africa and other continents.

Possible actions for job creation.

In a bid to promote youth development and empowerment the African Union Commission has developed a range of strategies and instruments adopted by the heads of state and government. By deciding to focus on the theme *"Accelerating Youth Empowerment (in Africa) for Sustainable Development"* during the Heads of State and Government Conference in 2011, the African Union highlighted the importance of youth empowerment. The AU gave more precision to its role and contribution in the development processes.



Image of the new AU Building: by day and by night.

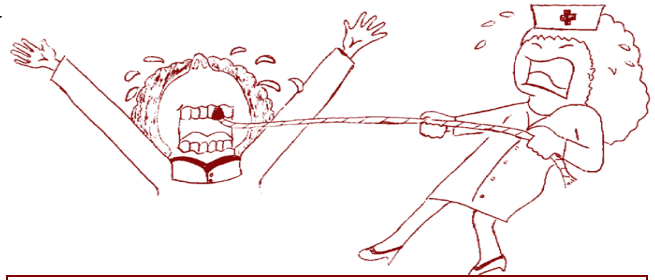
Aware of the existing challenges, African leaders adopted the *"Programme for the Modernization of the Informal Economy"* during the 2010 AU Summit in Addis Ababa. This program recognizes the need to support policies and strategies that promote youth employment, and focuses on the informal sector as a means to create productive and remunerative employment for the youth and adults. A *"Joint Initiative for Youth Employment in Africa"* is being finalized, and can provide the framework and guidelines for a more sensible and effective support in the monitoring and evaluation of policies, and programs that promote productive growth and are rich in the creation of productive employment for young people. It will be followed by the preparation of a detailed and consolidated program, accompanied with an action plan under the auspices of the AU, ECA, the World Bank, ILO and ADB. There is therefore a common point of contact between *"Accelerating African Youth Empowerment for Sustainable Development"* and *"The Intensification of Intra-African Trade"*: the youth.

Patrick DONKENG Eddy
African Union Youth Volunteer (AUYV)
Division of Social Affairs

MONTHLY PROVERB

“Until the rotten tooth is pulled out, the mouth must chew with caution.” – West African Proverb.

If you have never had a rotten tooth, perhaps you have met someone with one. When someone has a rotten tooth they must eat with immense caution and, if the bacteria has eaten too deep into the tooth, the person’s mouth may not function at all.



“Don’t worry my dear, by the time I’m through with you, you’ll be just fine.”

This proverb means that, ***until negative influences or people with ill intentions are sorted out, they will always be an obstruction in any group aimed at promoting the growth of the society, no matter how few they are.***

I can see you smile as you relate to this proverb. Have fun and use it on those around you. See you next month.

Bari Fanzo

African Union Youth Volunteer (AUYV)

USAU Youth Liaison to the AU

AN INVENTOR IN THE MAKING - ISRAEL BELEMA



There is a French adage that goes ***“the worth of one’s age does not depend on the number of years.”*** This saying applies to the life of Israel Belema, our youth hero for this month.

Israel Belema: An inventor in the making

Israel is a young Ethiopian who wants to conquer the world of information, communication and technology. In July 2011, he was a trainee of the second batch of the African Union Youth Volunteers Corps (AUYVC), a program that recruits and works with youth volunteers from all of the Member States of the African Union. His passion and determination to bring more to his country and, ultimately, the African continent, are worth sharing with everyone.

Israel Belema was born in the rural Ethiopian town of Ginchi, 90 km west of Addis Ababa, in 1988. As a kid, he was always fascinated by electrical gadgets. He wanted to know how they worked, rather than just enjoy the pleasures they provided. At the age of 6, Israel already understood the basic functions and mechanisms of many of the electrical devices he had at home. A few years later, he heard about a machine that could transmit sounds, making it possible for people to communicate with each other over long distances. This discovery sparked Israel’s interest and he began to seek a better understanding of telephones.

By the time he turned 13, Israel had developed his own telephone network and had begun providing telephone services in his community. The Ethiopian Telecommunication Corporation (ETC) noticed that there was some telephone network service being provided in Ginchi, which was not under their control. That was how Israel was discovered. ETC immediately sponsored Israel as a student in Telecommunications and Basic Transmissions at the ETC Training Center and he later pursued a degree in Computer Engineering at the Microlink Information Technology College.

Israel currently works as a researcher at the ETC and has made many innovative contributions during his tenure, which includes camera editing machines, as well as voice recording and conferencing systems. He also has two patents - one for developing an independent telecommunications network and another for inventing a unique international car security system.

To discover more about Israel’s amazing journey in the world of telecommunications, please visit: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jMp0GqeD5e0>

Patrick DONKENG Eddy

African Union Youth Volunteer (AUYV)

Division of Social Affairs

THE ICASA YOUTH PRE-CONFERENCE

In December of 2011, Addis Ababa hosted the International Conference on AIDS and STI in Africa, known as ICASA. This important conference gathered world-renowned experts and speakers on the subject along with thousands of other participants to share and promote best practices.

In order to prepare African youth participants for ICASA, the ICASA YouthFront and the African Union Commission (AUC) Youth Division organized the ICASA Youth Pre-Conference. This three-day conference was comprised of hundreds of young Africans involved in HIV/AIDS and youth advocacy on the continent. Along with other representatives, the Pre-Conference distinguished speakers from

organizations such as the Ford Foundation, UNICEF, UNFPA, and the AUC.

The stated goals of the Pre-Conference were:

To provide technical information and capacity building on the political, scientific, economic and social context of HIV/AIDS to young people so they can effectively participate in the main ICASA activities.

To empower young people through information, advocacy, and relationship-building to be advocates for youth and HIV/AIDS issues at the main conference, in their home countries and internationally.

The Pre-Conference's focus on preparing the participants for the main ICASA event recognized the ability of young people to

trigger positive changes in conventional methodologies. Participants demonstrated new approaches taken by young people in the fight against HIV/AIDS and STIs in Africa.

By exchanging these ideas from the Pre-Conference, young participants strengthened their contribution to the main ICASA conference by complementing their own experience with that of their colleagues and peers. Without adequate youth involvement at ICASA, the new projects and policies to fight HIV/AIDS would have been incomplete. Thanks to the Pre-Conference and the enthusiasm of its participants, that was not the case.

*Freaselam Belay
Peace Corps Volunteer (PCV)
African Union Youth Division*

SUDOKU

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DID YOU KNOW? ... LET'S DISCUSS ON FACEBOOK
(Facebook page name: U.S. Mission to the African Union)

Water Pressures in Africa and its Long-Term Impacts

Did you know that the total amount of fresh water on the earth's surface is only 3%, and of that 3% about 0.3% flows in rivers, lakes and swamps while 2.7% of fresh water is locked in icecaps and glaciers? Fortunately, Africa has most of the world's 0.3% of fresh water but only uses about 2% of that small amount, which means 98% of the 0.3% remains unused.

By another estimate, if the African continent maintains a sustained growth of 2.3% its population will double in size within approximately 31 years. Likewise, it is estimated that by the year 2050, roughly one in four people will live on the African continent. And by that same year, it is estimated that Africa's share of the world's population will reach 23%, and that it will be larger than that of China or India. Similarly, the population growth of Sub-Saharan Africa is estimated to grow from 700 million, which it was in 2007 to 1.1 billion in 2030, which means that overall water demand will likely double in the first half of the 21st Century. In North Africa, an estimate states that the Maghreb region's need for fresh water will exceed the amount of available water within the next decade given its population growth and increased demands.

It is also worth noting that agriculture in Africa provides for the livelihood of about three-quarters of the continent's population. Of that figure, pastoralists represent about 40-60%. Nearly all of Africa's agriculture is rain-fed meaning that crops are extremely vulnerable to drought, flooding, local conflicts, and wars. All these factors combined with continued population growth have resulted in the loss of arable lands.

The question here is what does this mean for Africa? The loss of arable land due to deforestation, overgrazing, and fuel gathering will contribute to the continued reduction in agricultural yields, crop failures, loss of livestock, and, a danger to rural and pastoral populations.

With climate change, the longer term impacts could include:

- Changing rainfall patterns – which will affect agriculture and reduce food security;
- Loss of water security;
- Decline in food and other resources available in African lakes - due to rising temperatures and overfishing;
- Rising sea levels - which will affect low-lying coastal areas and populations; and
- The loss of water resources could contribute to an increase in border conflicts.

The increased demand for food, water, and space, to meet the growing population's needs, has already greatly impacted some African countries' efforts to increase tourism. For instance, as a result of overgrazing, deforestation, the uncontrolled destruction of wildlife, and population pressures, the wildlife population and game parks, which in many African nations serve as a valuable touristic attraction, have been destroyed. In fact, many say it is rare to see a lion these days and if current actions continue, many more species could start to gradually disappear.

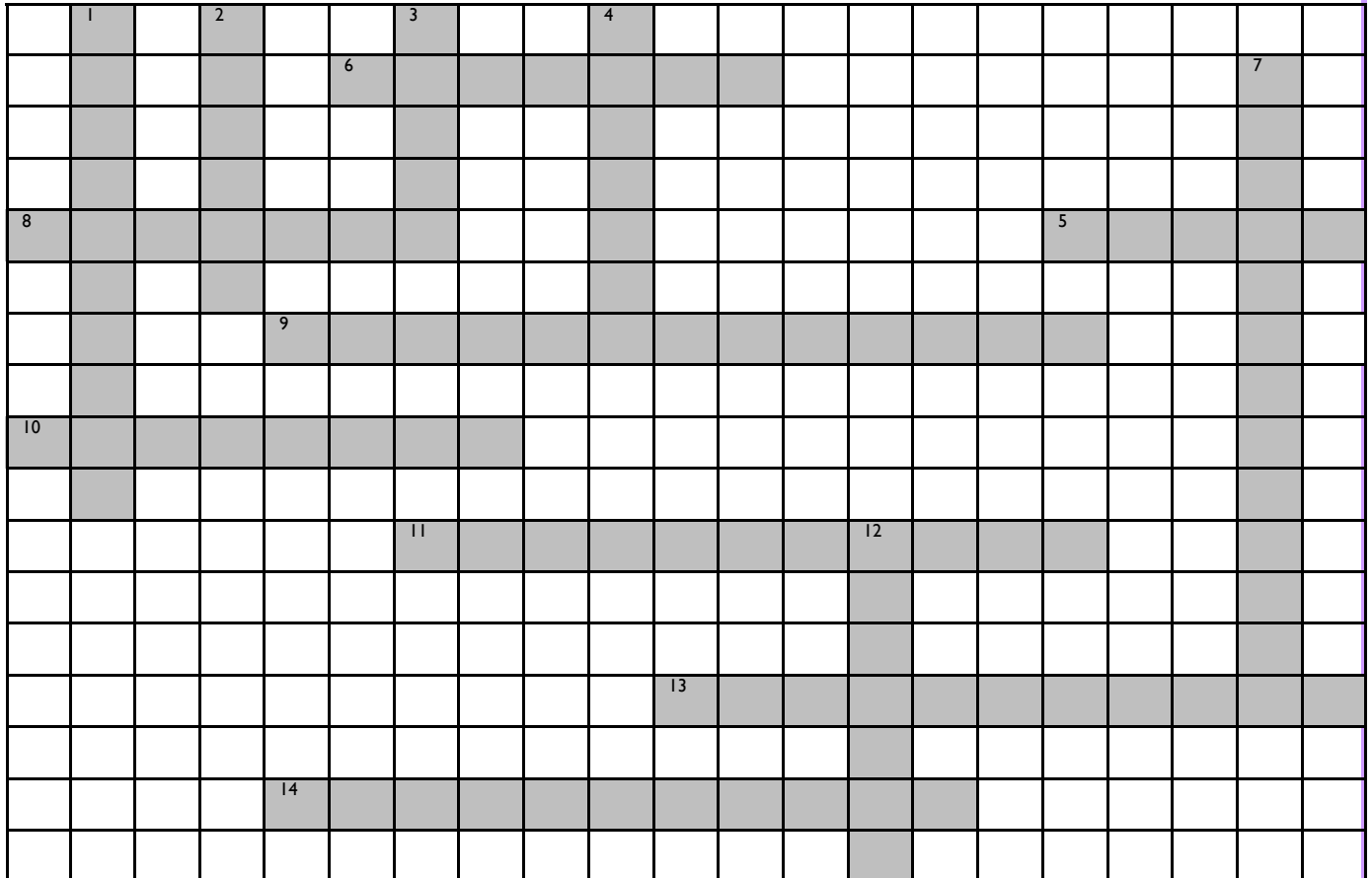
Please tell us what you think on Facebook in response to the following:

- What do you consider as the best method to prevent African water crisis by 2050?
- Can you share some examples of current actions being implemented to avoid this crisis? What do you think could be improved in Africa's response to this crisis?

The information has been provided through various open sources.

Photo by ngasuma@capacitate.co.tz

CROSSWORD PUZZLE



ACROSS

5. An abundant flow of water over land which is usually not submerged.
6. A region found at the North West of Africa and consists of Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia.
8. A solid form of water accumulated through the years and found on high mountains.
9. A long-term change in the earth's average atmospheric temperature due to natural variability or human activities.
10. A state of disharmony between two or more parties that is often manifested in prolonged fighting.
11. The cultivation of land, production of crops and raising of livestock.
13. Excessive grazing of animals on land to the detriment of the vegetation.
14. Another name for a shepherd or a herder.

DOWN

1. A set of individuals inhabiting a territory.
2. A major land mass situated between the Atlantic and the Indian Ocean.
3. A transparent, odorless, tasteless liquid.
4. A prolonged period of water shortage that affects growing or living conditions.
7. The indiscriminate cutting down trees or clearing off of forests.
12. Travelling for leisure, recreational or business purposes.

A WORD TO THE WISE AMBASSADOR MICHAEL A. BATTLE

With a smile on his face Michael A. Battle, Ambassador of the U. S. Mission to the African Union (USAU) headquartered in Addis Ababa welcomes us into his office. As a youth, it is practically impossible not to succumb to the fatherly countenance he radiates.



H. E. Michael A. Battle:
U.S. Ambassador to the
African Union

The USAU Youth: Good Morning Sir and thank you for taking the time to have this interview with us.

Ambassador Battle: No worries, (he says while showing us our seats) How has your work been so far?

The USAU Youth: Good Sir. Without taking any more of your time, can you please tell me a little about yourself, including your background and perhaps some highlights from your youth?

Ambassador Battle: I am the fourth child in a family of 12 children from the same parents. I was raised in St. Louis, Missouri. My family insisted on education and of the 12 children, we have 1 judge, 4 nurses; 3 of whom worked in administration, 3 preachers; 2 of which are pastors, and some siblings who are still in the process of emerging in life.

My parents however, lived in Mississippi but were forced to leave because the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) was after my father. They were after him because, a white man called my mom a liar and my father retorted by saying, *"I don't care who you are but you have no right to call my wife a liar."* That comment was enough to cost him his life. Fortunately my grandfather pastored a church, and my parents moved from house to house, staying with church members until they crossed the border and were out of Mississippi. That was how my dad escaped execution.

The USAU Youth: That is quite an interesting story. As a young boy raised in St. Louis, what were some key values that served as the basis of your upbringing? How did they mold you into the person you are today?

Ambassador Battle: There were three main principles my father indoctrinated into each of us, they were:

- Love God.
- Get an education.
- Never leave the house without remembering who you are.

In fact he made us look at our reflection in the mirror every morning before going out and we had to say *"I am a Battle and I will uphold my name today."*

The USAU Youth: What would you say are the qualities that fueled your success?

Ambassador Battle: The first is *self-reliance*. I started working at the age of 12. From that age on, I provided everything for myself; I never relied on my parents for clothes, money, or anything else. In fact, at the age of 15 or 16 I had a yard business and was employing others. Throughout my education, from undergraduate through my Masters degree even on to my Doctorate, I can say that there was only 5 dollars that I received from my father that I never paid back. Now, he gave me a lot of money and all, but I had to pay it back. The second is a *large family*. Many people think growing up in a large family is challenging but I don't think so. The experiences I had with my family made me stronger and cemented many of the principle values in my life today. In fact, in 1957 when I was about 7 years old, in the first or second grade, my dad had a grocery store and a restaurant, which meant my mom didn't have to work and we had a comfortable life. Then, between 1958 and 1960 there was a period of 'urban renewal' in St. Louis and my dad's store and restaurant were closed down. During that period we experienced what it was like to be less fortunate. We had to move out of our house and into a new neighborhood, where we were the poorest family. While the other kids in the neighborhood had bikes and new clothes, we had neither. This lasted for just two years – a period long enough to

*"I am a
Battle
and
I will
uphold my
name
today."*

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illustrate for me that my family was a team. My father later got into the taxi business, and even owned a fleet of cars, which ensured that our family was reasonably comfortable again. So I know what it's like to have a lot, and I know what it's like to have nothing and then bounce back.

The USAU Youth: From a young landscaper to an Ambassador, your life illustrates that anything is possible. Now looking back over your long career as an educator, what do you regard as your greatest professional achievement so far, and what impact has it had on you?

Ambassador Battle: My greatest professional achievement is yet to come. However I can say I was blessed to have the opportunity to teach university students. This was truly a rewarding experience. I taught Logic and Scientific Method, which were not easy courses, but watching my students improve and reach their full capabilities was a gratifying experience. I was also the Chaplain while teaching at Hampton University and this too was a wonderful experience.

Today I still meet a lot of my students and it pleases me to see what they have achieved in life. I believe that when I'm old, there are two things that I can say brought me satisfaction:

- My time spent as an educator and,
- The time I spent serving President Barack Obama and Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton as U.S. Ambassador to the African Union.

The USAU Youth: A man of your stature has, without a doubt, had to overcome some major career challenges. Can you describe what these obstacles were, how you overcame them, and the lessons you learned.

Ambassador Battle: One example I recall is when I applied for a job at an academic institution and while I was in the application process, I was not informed that the institution had difficulties with its accreditation (accreditation is a system in the U.S. to ensure that educational institutions meet government mandated levels of quality). So, on my first day at work, I was confronted with that accreditation issue and the institution was given one year to straighten out its issues.

I took up the challenge and told the accreditation board, to give us just 6 months, not one year, and that if within these 6 months the issues were not resolved then it will never be fixed. After 6 months the board did a thorough, comprehensive review and we had zero recommendations and zero suggestions - the highest accreditation result possible for any academic institution. The institution moved from the brink of being closed into a model for other institutions. Let me tell you there were sleepless nights and lots of hard work. There was also a high level of risk because if in 6 months the institution was still in bad shape, the administration would have gotten into real trouble. Later in my career I joined the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), a large accreditation board that serves from Virginia to Florida and over to Texas – it covers the entire southeastern region of the United States.

The USAU Youth: Throughout your career you have met and worked with many different people, from diverse cultural and socio-economic backgrounds, can you elaborate on both the positive and negative aspects of such collaborations?

Ambassador Battle: Working with people from diverse backgrounds is always a completely positive experience. There is nothing negative in it, there may be challenges but that's not negative. The positive aspects are that you get to work with people who challenge your way of thinking and you too can challenge theirs, and this is a very enriching experience. Sometimes you will get into disagreements, but in my life I don't take disagreements personally. It is a growing process; you learn from them and become better. I do remember a time when I had to discontinue a few people's contracts, but that happens in professional life. I did that only when

"Opportunity presents itself to every person. The difference is that it takes courage to be prepared to open the door when opportunity knocks."

I noticed that their actions were preventing the organization or institution from moving forward.

The USAU Youth: I believe there are many young people who look up to you as a role model. In a single statement what can you tell them is the foundation of your life and how could they benefit from this?

Ambassador Battle: Apart from what my father taught me, I have a deep belief that *opportunity presents itself to every person*. The difference is that it takes courage to be prepared to open the door when opportunity knocks. That door you have to open, are the risks you have to bear. You will have to bear the risk of being wrong, of failing, and even of being right and no one seeing it. I believe that the future is always unfolding itself at every moment. Some people believe that X, Y, and Z are predetermined, and are simply meant to happen but I believe that X, Y, and Z are possibilities which you have to shape.

The USAU Youth: Your life is such an inspiration, I'm wondering who your heroes or role models were when you were younger.

Ambassador Battle: My heroes are all ordinary people who have done extraordinary things. The first hero in my life is *my father, Jesse Battle*. He is now deceased, but I'm

grateful for the upbringing he gave my siblings and myself. My second hero is a man who was our *neighbor*. His name is *James A. Johnson*. He wasn't my hero because he was wealthy or powerful, but because he was straightforward and principled. He is now 84 years old and when I visited him some years back, and he asked me "*Michael why have you come to see me?*" and I said, "*I came to say thank you.*" "*What for?*" he asked and I said "*I want to thank you for being the person you were back in our neighborhood when I was a young boy; thank you for being the role model you were not only to your kids but to all the young people in the neighborhood, and thank you for listening to us and not sending us away when we came to talk with you.*" He was overwhelmed. My last hero was my *high school counselor, Mr. Evans*. Not everyone is lucky enough to have a counselor that believes in you and all that you can do. He believed that I had tremendous capability.

The USAU Youth: Thank you once more Sir for granting this interview and sharing this part of your life with young people around the world, and especially those in Africa, where you are currently serving.

Ambassador Battle: Thank you for coming.

*Bari Fanso
African Union Youth Volunteer (AUYV)
USAU Youth Liaison to the AU*

ANNOUNCEMENTS

United States Mission to the African Union

Deputy Secretary of State Bill Burns will lead a high-level United States Government delegation to Africa from **January 26 – 30**. In Ethiopia Deputy Secretary Burns also attended the 18th African Union (AU) Summit in Addis Ababa on **January 29 – 30**. The Deputy Secretary will also meet with Prime Minister Meles and other senior officials to emphasize the strategic importance of Ethiopia to countering violent extremism in the greater Horn of Africa region. Deputy Secretary Burns will meet with several regional and international leaders on the margins of the AU Summit. Prior to the summit, the delegation will travel to Ghana, Uganda, and South Sudan.

African Union Commission

The AUC provides opportunities for students enrolled in graduate programs to undertake intern at its Head quarters in Addis Ababa. Only applicants with a bachelor's degree will be considered. Please note that the internships within the commission are unpaid. For more information please visit: <http://au.int/pages/e-recruitment/apply>

CELEBRATING INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTEER DAY

Volunteerism is when people freely offer their skills and time for the greater good and benefit of societies and communities. The inalienable asset that volunteers possess is their willingness to put others before their own interests in offering their assistance, whether they are young people or experienced professionals. Volunteerism captures the essence of altruism and promotes the beauty of exercising free will to offer that which may be of help to others.

In 1985 the United Nations designated December 5 to be International Volunteer Day. Every year on this day since 1985, volunteers' selfless contributions to society are recognized and appreciated. In order to highlight the importance of the work that volunteers do, this day is celebrated around the world by volunteers and the communities and organizations they serve. This day is also used to promote the ideal of "volunteerism" as a way of promoting socio-economic development across the world.

In light of this global cause, the African Union Commission celebrated the International Volunteer Day in conjunction with the one year anniversary of its flagship volunteer service program, the African Union Youth Volunteer Corps (AUYVC). This day offered the unique opportunity to showcase and celebrate the valuable contribution of volunteers to Africa's development. To mark this inaugural event, volunteers from two sister organizations, Peace Corps and Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) came together to join the AUYVC in a series of activities that highlighted their contributions as well as promoting the ideal of volunteerism.

Highlights of the activities of the day included:

1. Visiting the British International School and the American International School and engaging students on what it means to be a volunteer.
2. Presentations on the history and goals of different volunteer organizations, what they do, how and where they engage in volunteerism, and a final question and answer session with the students.

The essence and key goal of engaging with these students was to cultivate the Spirit of Volunteerism amongst the

next generation of students and there were interesting questions they raised including:

- "Do you want to be rich one day or do you like being poor, since you are not paid?"
- "Are you volunteers because you did not get jobs?"
- "Who trains the volunteers that train you as volunteers?"
- "How can we help your volunteer organizations?"
- "How can we also volunteer as students?"
- "What is the difference between charity and Volunteering?"



Marking the International Volunteer Day

These questions were provocative, humorous and genuine and as we responded to each of them, we felt a great sense of joy and satisfaction with our opportunity to enlighten young students about volunteerism.

This session asked the young students to consider volunteerism not just as an option, but as a way of life that can benefit their communities, countries and continent. The questions the young students asked also provoked us to explore more training and capacity building forums for the young generation on volunteerism, as well as curriculum reform to inculcate tenets of volunteerism in teaching programs and extra-curricular activities.

The day ended with a discussion on the challenges of volunteering and future possible areas of collaboration to promote volunteerism in Africa. The event also raised the profile of international volunteers in Ethiopia as well as their organizations as they showcased their individual and institutional experiences in volunteerism in the country and across Africa.

"The greatest investment you can ever make is in people."

Lawrence Muli,
African Union Youth Volunteer (AUYV)
Advocacy and Communications Associate, AUC

THE VOICE OF VOLUNTEERS

ANNICK LAURE TCHUENDEM



Annick Laure Tchuendem

My name is Annick Laure Tchuendem and I am an African Union Youth Volunteer working as a Human Resource Associate for the African Union (AU). Coming from Cameroon in the Central African Region, I speak both English and French.

When I first arrived in Addis Ababa as an intern in October 2010, my first cultural shock was the language. I was expecting English, but found myself hearing Amharic, the most widely spoken language in Ethiopia. I kept asking myself, **“how can I be an African in Africa and not be able to communicate with other Africans?”** It was a little frustrating being the outsider, so I decided to do something about it. I immediately began interacting more with the local people and soon enough I learned words to make new friends, ask for things, and travel around Addis safely. That was one challenge I overcame and I’m glad I did. This is really the beauty of volunteer work; meeting different people and learning new languages and cultures.

You might wonder how I came to Addis as an intern but ended up an AU volunteer. While doing my internship I learned that the AU was launching the African Union Youth Volunteers Corps (AUYVC) in Nigeria in December 2010. The program, whose objective is to recruit African youth to work for the development of Africa, was also going to train the first batch of volunteers during that launch. As soon as I heard about the AUYVC, I wanted to be a part of it. So I went online and applied to be a part of the second batch of volunteers. Fortunately for me, I was selected and trained as an AUYV with the Batch II volunteers at Malabo in Equatorial Guinea. Thinking of my time in Malabo makes me nostalgic; Spanish songs continuously resound in my head, and the blend between work and fun during the training was just perfect.

So I was trained and deployed to work for the AUC (African Union Commission) Youth Division under the directorate of the Department of Human Resources, Science and Technology (HRST). At the Youth Division I developed an HR (Human Resource) framework within the AUYVC, as well as HR tools, and AUYVC policies and procedure manuals. I love what I do, but as enriching as it is, I have noticed one setback affecting youth in Africa. Everywhere I’ve been in my beloved continent, people do not take young people seriously. They judge us from our youthfulness and label us as **“too young to know what to do or how to do it”**. The challenge we have is to prove our worth by working hard in everything we do, no matter how small the task. I am quite confident that a few years from now, we will completely change our elders’ way of thinking.

Working as a volunteer in another African country has been a wonderful experience so far for me. I’ve learned so much by continuing to expand my networks, which is not always a walk in the park, but is completely worth the effort. The lesson I’ve learned while working as an AUYV is **“Everything is possible, if you just work hard to overcome the challenges.”**

Thanks **USAU Youth** for giving me the chance to share my experience with my brothers and sisters in Africa and around the world.

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